2: Courlander B-6 (1937-1955) 1960 HV3 Haiti HV3



The importance of water in Vodoun has a fundamentally West African character. Among the Yoruba and the Ashanti and in Dahomey, for example, water rites are a significant aspect of religious ritual. Herskovits notes the frequency of religious pilgrimages to streams in West Africa.

In one instance, at Abeokuta, a bedecked procession of worshipers left a shrine atop a high hill, followed a long path to the riverside over two miles away, and returned before the ceremonies could be carried out at the shrine of the god. On one occasion, in Dahomey, the bed of the sacred stream ran dry was "tilled" from nearby wells so that this water could be ritually redrawn for use in an especially important ceremony. Among the Ashanti, pilgrimages to Lake Bosumtwe and other sacred bodies of water regularly occur. And it is on such occasions that the spirit of the river or lake or sea manifests itself, by "entering the head" of the devotee and causing him to fling himself, possibly possessed, into the water.[1]

So it is also in Haiti, where possession at the river's edge may cause the devotee to leap into the river. At Saut d'Eau, possessed persons plunge into the waterfall without regard for their safety, being in the care of the loa who have mounted them.

Into this water complex the Christian rite of baptism has been easily absorbed, providing merely a new act of veneration for water and its properties. In the Haitian mind baptism is not far removed from the *lavé tête* ritual, the washing of the head, or the *rafraîchi tête*, the "refreshing" of the head, both of which are acts in propitiation of the loa.[2] So related is the baptismal concept in the Haitian mind, that the term "baptisé" is used to describe the lavé tête; it is said that the loa is being "baptized." So also are drums "baptized," not to mention yams, and even the hounfor itself.

### Marriage to a Loa

Although the term *hounsi* (spirit wife, or wife of the spirit) is applied to a large class of servitors of the Vodoun temple, only a small number of servitors ever pass through rites which give them a husband-wife or wife-husband relationship with a loa. Reasons for these mystic marriages vary, but usually the rituals take place upon the prescription of a cult priest who interprets the will of the deities concerned. Most of the mystic marriages of which I have heard have taken place in the general area of Port-au-Prince and the Cul-de-Sac Plain. In some other areas of Haiti it appears that no such rites have taken place locally within the memory of the older inhabitants. One aged man living near Belladère declared: "It [marriage to a loa] is impossible. People serve loa, they do not marry them. A man does not marry his lwas. A loa

[1] [Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past, p. 233. Cf. p. 351, Category 116. -- Analyst]

[2] [It is of interest to note the perseverance of traditional attitudes toward a number rites in certain areas in the United States. Every baptism often is preceded by ritual observed in almost the same form. Cf. p. 351, Category 116. -- Analyst]

D: Courlander 9-5 (1937-1938) 1960 SV3 HAIti SV3



588 does not marry his horse. People marry people. Loa marry loa. A man
588 may have a compact with a loa. That is not a marriage. Some of the
184 things that are going on down there in the Plain are not right. They are not the old way. In the old days we did things differently. We did not always run to the houngan. The grand famille knew how to talk to the loa. Up here we don't do things the way they do them down below in the city. People marry people. Loa marry loa."

588 Nevertheless, the practice in the neighborhood of Port-au-Prince and
589 the Cul-de-Sac Plain is for mystic marriages to take place when deemed
184 useful, essential, or unavoidable. Foremost among the loa involved in these rites is Èzilie Wèdo, the "pure" one, the deity of love, sometimes identified with the Virgin Mary. Other loa known to have taken part in mystic marriages are Damballa, Ogoun, Ayizà, Agwé, Gédé Nimbo or one of his brothers, Cousin Zaka, and Général Clermeil. All these loa—significantly, I think—have clearly defined personalities; much is known about their character and behavior, their likes and dislikes.

588 A man married to Èzilie has special obligations to her for the dura-
[834] tion of his life. On certain days (especially Thursday, which is sacred to this deity), the mortal "husband" may not have sexual intercourse, even though he has a human wife.

588 Circumstances leading to a mystic marriage vary widely, but in each
185 case it is a cult priest who determines whether the rites should be
193 held. Perhaps a person has been afflicted with a series of illnesses or mis-
910 fortunes. He goes to his houngan, who begins a series of communications with the client's loa or with his own. Sometimes many loa are consulted before the desired information is available. Eventually it is determined that a certain deity, for reasons which may or may not be clear, wishes to have nuptial ties with the client. The illnesses or misfortunes that have been sent are a means of informing or warning the person concerned.
[953]
[991]

Sometimes the houngan relies on well-established divining methods to ascertain the cause of the difficulties. He may employ the grande (a shell that slides on a string), cobes, or small shells that are thrown on the ground. Or he may rely on possession by a loa to provide the information.
[989]

If it is found that a loa is demanding marriage, arrangements are then made. The rites that follow may take place in a houmfor or at the house of the human bride or groom. Both a prêt' savane and a houngan officiate.

588 The person directly involved, like the loa, usually has something to
554 gain from a mystic marriage. For one thing, he can reasonably expect

3: Courlander 8-6 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Hall SV3



special future help and consideration from the loa (including the cessation of the illnesses or other misfortunes that have led to the marriage). A man (or woman) united with a loa in "matrimony" is "stronger" (*plus fort*) in his relationship to his environment and to other people. For this reason, the initiative for a mystic marriage does not always come from a loa. An ambitious person may seek such a marriage to strengthen his hand, to provide protection against other deities or human enemies, or to gain wealth or position. One observer, Odette Mennesson Rigaud, expresses the opinion that in such instances the marriage "is no longer a religious union of mystic love, but a magic pact."[n 4] The implicit element of "pact" is so evident in all mystic marriages, even when the initiative comes from the loa, that the distinction is not easily appreciated. However, persons suspected of "pushing" for a marriage with a loa are regarded as presumptuous or reckless, and often they are believed to have hidden motives. It is felt by many that the benefits of such a union can be only temporary and that catastrophe will ultimately follow.

A human party to marriage with a loa is deeply committed. He is subject to jealousy and anger on the part of his mystic mate. His behavior in the houmfor as in his daily life must be beyond the loa's reproach. He must avoid possession by other loa. And he must fulfill endless obligations. Sometimes the prospect of such binding ties is more than a man (or woman) is ready to face, and through the intercession of a strong houngan the loa may be induced to withdraw his demand for marriage. In that event, a special service is held, in the course of which the person buys his freedom with promises of special gifts and feasts for the deity.

One young man I knew was caught in a special dilemma—the houngan and the loa on one side, the Protestant Church on the other. The man, named Maurice, came from the mountains near Léogane. He was married but had no children. His wife's family, still living in Léogane, was Protestant. Maurice himself was a follower of Vodoun, and nominally a Catholic. When his wife was afflicted with a long series of headaches and earaches, Maurice consulted a houngan of Port-au-Prince. The houngan said that the loa Ayida Wèdo was demanding marriage with Maurice, and that the wife's illnesses were an indication of jealousy.

At the same time, the wife's parents came from Léogane and insisted that the girl's illnesses were brought about by God because Maurice was a follower of Vodoun. They demanded that he sever all his connections with Vodoun and become a Protestant.

After considerable anxiety, Maurice "purged" himself of Vodoun and

[n 4] Odette Mennesson Rigaud, "Notes on Two Marriages with Vodoun Loa," in Appendix A of Deren, Divine Horsemen, p. 264 of pbk. (Thames & Hudson ltd. -- Analyst)

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159 joined the Protestant Church. Subsequently his wife's illnesses subsided somewhat, but she never bore children. Maurice suspected that the latter misfortune was the result of his spurning his mystic suitor.

588 The actual ceremonies by which a mystic marriage is performed carry over many of the customs and trappings of ordinary mortal marriages. [193] The prêt' savane reads prayers and officiates until the two parties are deemed wed. The lea is represented by a "maiden," usually a person possessed by the lea and dressed in appropriate garb. Gold wedding rings are placed upon the fingers of the couple. There are wedding cakes and wedding contracts. Nothing appropriate to an ordinary wedding is omitted.

2. Courlander 8:4 (1937-1954) 1960 8V3 H681 8V3

[The Vodoun Pantheon]



the earth like the carrying pad that women wear to support bundles on their heads. Wherever Ayido Wédo shifted his position there were earthquakes. When the rainbow appeared after a rain it was said that Ayido had come out from under the earth to drink of the fresh water.

Dumbalá Grand Comte (Dumbalá of the Highway). Another manifestation of Dumbalá as a protector of those on long journeys.

Dumbalá Vlass. Another manifestation of Dumbalá.

Dumbi Wlan. Considered to be the daughter of Dumbalá. The ending of her name (-si) suggests that at one time she may have been considered a wife rather than a daughter.

Dumi Wlan. A member of Dumbalá's family.

Anlo Wlan. A member of Dumbalá's family. Said to be a "work lwa" who aids men with their gardens, especially in time of illness.

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Fanm Dose, or Dosou, sometimes spelled Essous. One of the "big" lwa of the Dahomé pantheon, a symbol of purity, and sometimes identified with the Virgin Mary. Her color is white, and services to her include a ritual sweeping and sprinkling of the earth and a perfuming of the air. Food offerings to her include corn cured and eggs. Male "horses" of Ezilie are sometimes loaned to her by mystic marriages, and they are obligated to refrain from sexual intercourse on certain days which belong to her. There are a number of Ezilies, regarded as members of the same family or, in some cult centers, as different manifestations of the same deity. Some Haitians regard Ezilie Dobo as the sponsor of the Ezilie family and refer to her as Grand Ezilie. Note that there is a Dahomean town named Dogba at approximately 6° 4' E., 6° 50' N.

Fanm Fédée, or Fanm Dosouvou (Dahomé), or Fanm Fédée Dosouvou. Like Ezilie Dobo, she is a symbol of purity and is identified with the Virgin Mary. Mystic marriages are performed with her, and her "horses" are obligated to refrain from sexual intercourse on certain days. She is also a giver of wealth.

Fanm Wlan. A sister or daughter of Ezilie Dobo and also related to Dumbalá.

Fanm Mazon. A sister of Ezilie Fédée.

Fanm Rouge. A manifestation of Ezilie who is especially fond of the Rada dances.

Fanm Hounon (Red Eyes). A warm and lusty Ezilie who is often identified with Pétro rather than Dahomé rites.

Alose Fédée. A member of the Ezilie nanon, regarded as a market-place protector. In Dahomey, Alose was a protector of all public gathering places.

Alose Bazilé

Alose Dlanzi Bosu Bosu

Mahwesso Mouzon. A special form of Ezilie as princess.

Mahwesso Ewenmesa, or Twenmesa. A person mounted by this Ezilie talks only Spanish.

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Sousa, or Sousou. A chamber deity who feeds women in the early stages of pregnancy. Some of the women chosen by Sobo are regarded as the sacred residence of various lwa. Sobo (or Sogbo) is a member of the original Thunder pantheon of Dahomey.

Sousa Bosú, or Sousa Bosú, or simply Bosú. A close relative of Sobo, regarded as the possessor of the lightning (bosú). In Dahomey, Bosú is sometimes referred to as one of the deity Sobo's.

[See Ellis, The Ewe-speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, pp. 94-95; and Herskovits, Dahomey, II, pp. 244 ff. Cf. p. 359 Category 116. -- Analyst]

1 [Ellis, op. cit., p. 52. Cf. p. 359, Category 116. -- Analyst]

2 [Herskovits, op. cit., pp. 162 ff. Cf. p. 359, Cat. 116. -- Analyst]

3: Leyburn Z-4,5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



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may not have all the heart desires. Under Dessalines there had been stern discipline of the workers but no recognition of the aristocracy; now under Pétion the people went their own inefficient way, but aristocratic eminence was happily recognized.

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Examples of experimental legislation abound. Some proposals succeeded but more failed. One of the partial successes was the establishment of an agricultural holiday, *la fête de l'Agriculture*, to stimulate interest in good cultivation. Two months before the day set, the commandants of departments, arrondissements, and cantons, together with the justices of these divisions, were to nominate the laborer in each parish who had done the best work of the year. A prize medal was awarded not only for the sake of honoring him but also to stimulate his fellows. Similarly the officials would choose a child between seven and ten years of age, living on the best cultivated habitation in the district and belonging to parents most distinguished by their conduct and fondness for work, to be brought up and educated at the expense of the state. The annual feast was celebrated for many years after Pétion's death, but the officials became too lax to make careful selections of prize-winners. The holiday was kept, therefore, but served none of its original purposes.

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As a case of legislation that failed may be cited the highly moral measure encouraging, but not requiring, legitimate marriages among cultivateurs rather than the customary informal union without ceremony. The preamble of this law pointed out that legal marriages were

> the only means of assuring a person of all the advantages of society; of procuring consolation, care, and help in sorrows and in sickness; of making purity of customs, so necessary for the happiness of men and the conservation of their health, reign among the people; of steadily increasing the population of each habitation; of extending agriculture and of increasing production.[30]

The mass of people, however, had had no experience of legal marriage. In the time of slavery such unions would not have been respected by an owner who wished to sell his slaves, and Dessalines had seemed to care very little whether people married or merely lived together informally. It will shortly be seen in detail how lasting was this inertia of tradition.[31]

30. Cited in Saint-Rémy, *op. cit.*, V, 80.
31. See Part III, "Race Relations and Home Life."

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



when slaves were to be sold. Even when whole families were brought over together from Africa, it was considered discreet in Saint-Domingue to separate the various members at the slave market, so that there would be little chance of combinations and intrigues. Theoretically the Church was in favor of regular marriages between slave men and women, but even if the Africans had understood or desired the "sacrament," the opposition of the white planters would have been enough to curb missionary insistence on this point; the Jesuits had already been expelled from the colony for their too great zeal in plantation reforms.

As a usual thing, then, slaves simply cohabited. It was not against the rules of a plantation for a slave and the woman with whom he consorted to live together in a slave hut with the children born to them; but neither was it against the rules for the overseer to put other slaves into the same hut, or to sell promising slave children as if they were cattle.[1] Little was done to prevent sex relations between slaves, although masters had varying attitudes toward the results of these relations: some planters welcomed births as a stockbreeder welcomes additions to his herd; others resented the pregnancy of slave women as an obstacle to necessary field work. In the former case, a planter's capital was increased; in the latter, abortions resulted when the overseer drove pregnant women to hard work under the tropical sun.

The freedom of the planters with the persons of their attractive female slaves likewise weakened any tendency toward monogamous family life as conceived by bourgeois European society. The relationship between master and slave woman was momentary. Not often was a woman so beguiling that she could be called a concubine; still less often was she a mistress. The latter estate was the height of any female slave's worldly ambition, for not only might she then be freed, but she could live a life of leisure. In rare cases she might hope to persuade her white paramour into marriage. Almost certainly her mulatto children would be free.

In so far as there was any predisposition toward strict observance of European marriage practices, it was most clearly exhibited by the group of affranchis. As freedmen they were intent upon establishing

1. Under exceptional circumstances slaves found themselves under a benevolent, religious master who allowed them to be married by a priest and themselves to live together as a family.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



# X

## HOME LIFE OF THE ÉLITE

ONE brief characterization of the élite might be that they are those who carefully observe the proprieties. The proprieties are those of France, and among them is "common sense" in marriage.

People of privilege in colonial times, which were the fountainhead of élite tradition, lived at ease and did not concern themselves with manual labor. Nor were they burdened by puritanical codes of sexual morality, but on the contrary enjoyed sex relations with whatever attractive women came their way. But they would have thought it sheer folly to allow momentary delight to interfere with the very practical matter of choosing a wife. Marriage meant increasing one's fortune, strengthening one's social position and connections, establishing one's children. Romance was as irrelevant to all this as to choosing a business partner. This attitude of the French planters, current even in France of the present day, was the standard for freedmen.

Even when wealth was most plentiful in colonial society it had not been always easy to find the proper wife for an affranchi youth. For a man to remain single, however, did not mean that he remained celibate. He might, on the contrary, contract a fairly permanent informal union of love, while discreetly refraining from a marriage which would jeopardize his own or his family's status. Such informal unions were not generally regarded as immoral. Good taste, it was felt, was a sufficient guide in all matters of sex outside of marriage.

The unsettled condition of the colony between the slave insurrection of 1791 and the achievement of independence in 1803–4 did not change the affranchi concept of suitable marriage. During the brief two-year rule of Dessalines, the ideal of propriety in marriage remained the same in spite of the Emperor's efforts to undermine the importance of legal weddings and the legitimacy of children. Pétion, upon his accession in 1806, showed himself a true member of the mulatto aristocratic group—indifferent to the morals of the masses so long as custom settled their problems for them, and content with the marriage traditions of the élite. He said publicly what was assu-

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



sary for a president to say as to proper respect for moral principles, then left morality to take care of itself.

During Pétion's time and that of Boyer there came into common usage the convenient term "*placage*" to describe the extramarital unions of respectable people. "Concubinage" was a crude word, with definite overtones of disapprobation; placage was more indirect, and carried no connotation of disrepute. Briefly, placage was the union of a man and a woman for pleasure, companionship, and a measure of home life, without the assumption by either person of any legal obligations. A man might make as many of these tentative unions as his disposition, his finances, and his tact dictated. Often enough they were with women of his own social class, for Haiti had an excess of women over men; but generally they were contracted with pleasing women of the lower social orders. Young men not yet financially able to marry, younger brothers whose inheritance was too small to support a family, husbands who had married for practical purposes rather than for love, and eagerly lustful men—these were the usual participators in placage.

Although for a woman a church wedding might be the height of ambition, and proper parents tried to see that their daughters achieved it, there came to be a feeling that no disgrace attached to being *placée*. Certainly at the beginning a wife outranked a placée, just as in colonial New England a wife outranked an old maid; but to be placée was a far better lot in Haiti than to be a spinster in Massachusetts Bay colony. No one would have thought of calling a placée by so inaccurate a term as "mistress"; still less would anyone have assailed her moral standing. A man who had a mistress might keep his arrangements with her secret; but placage unions were, or came to be, quite open. The one great flaw in the arrangement was that near middle age a man might cease to care about his union with the woman. Foresight and adaptability were the only safeguards against this fate.

Nowhere else in the Western World has there been so little actual marriage in proportion to the population as in Haiti. Whether technically it is correct to speak of peasant unions as examples of placage is a matter of opinion; certainly the peasants rarely marry. Thousands of Haitian couples in all walks of life could be found at any period since 1804 living quietly together from youth to age, bringing up a family of children with as much order as do others who have had a

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



wedding to consecrate their state. These unions might be called (after Anglo-Saxon usage) common-law marriages. Many such couples have, late in life, gone through the wedding ceremony at the insistence of children aspiring to social prestige.

Haitian writers have frequently felt it necessary to explain and justify to the outside world the practice of plaçage. Thus Saint-Rémy in 1857 wrote: "*Plaçage*, or primitive marriage, is still one of the Haitian customs. It requires no civil or religious formality. I must confess that some of these unions are more respectable than those sanctified by civil and religious law."[1] Dantès Bellegarde in 1934 implied (erroneously) that the practice had always been one limited primarily to peasants. He said:

> Haitians have been accused of immorality because they practice free unions. This reproach is unjust. Concubinage is without doubt the rule among the people [that is, the peasants and workmen]; but it constitutes a sort of *connubium injustum* (unlegal marriage) which, in many cases, has nothing immoral about it, certain "plaçages" having more solidity and seriousness than a large number of regular marriages. In order to understand the existence of this custom and its persistence in the lower classes of Haitian society, one must go back to the colonial epoch: the whites kept numerous concubines, white women being few in Saint-Domingue. (The white population of Saint-Domingue was composed in 1789 of 30,826 souls, of whom 21,166 were men and 9,660 women—not counting soldiers and sailors.) On the other hand, the Negroes did not marry each other, because they did not care at all to have wives whom the master might "abuse," to use the word of Père du Tertre; moreover, masters did not require their slaves to be married: they mated them with a view to obtaining fine "products."
>
> Concubinage tends to disappear among us, or at least to become more discreet. In the cultivated class people generally marry, and the girls in most modest condition—having passed through the primary schools—resign themselves willingly today to the diversion of their unused affections to cats and other domestic animals if no one offers to lead such girls to the altar.[2]

Nineteenth-century visitors were generally shocked by plaçage, just as middle-class people are usually shocked by sex ways which seem franker than their own. That the Haitian practice was a practical one, based upon a desire to preserve property intact within the

1. *Pétion et Haïti*, V, 66 note.
2. *Un Haïtien parle* (Port-au-Prince, 1934), pp. 30–31.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



family and to make only "sensible" marriages, was a fact rarely glimpsed by the critics. A good example of their attitude is the statement of the pious English Quaker, John Candler, in 1842:

> But few of the merchants or principal inhabitants are married men: concubinage is common, and unhappily, regarded as not dishonorable. Whenever a ball is given, or a large party invited, the invitation is equally extended to "Monsieur and Madame ——" or to "Monsieur —— and his lady"; and by this compounding of moral distinctions among the upper classes, the evil descends to the lower ranks and becomes perpetuated.[3]

And later Candler accuses Haitian mothers of being "utterly dead to all moral considerations," because they do not take pains to instill (middle-class English) ideals of morality, or teach the young the evils of "wayward passion."

Not even Haitian authors were willing to accept plaçage as a desirable practice. Beaubrun Ardouin explained that the color prejudice of colonial times was responsible for what he clearly considered an evil.[4] "The aristocracy of skin" made plaçage prevail over "divine law," for whites would not often in colonial times marry colored women. The same prejudice in the republic kept light-colored men from marrying darker women, but not from living with them. Ardouin believed that Haiti would gain infinitely by adopting "*les bonnes mœurs*," not on moral grounds, but for practical reasons. With regular marriage, he says, there would result a greater fixity of the conjugal state and more confidence on the part of the women, "who too often discover that they are only the satisfaction of a whim"; also the men would reflect more upon the consequence of an infidelity which, in dividing families, might separate children from father or mother and so greatly weaken the delicate relations of paternal love and filial piety. Still another consideration was political: the dispersion which resulted in the inheritance of property when many mothers and children compete. Because of plaçage unions, quite a number of estates had been reduced to almost nothing.

As the century progressed, the custom of plaçage prevailed from the President down to the humblest peasant. The women of the President were visited publicly by him; sometimes he was accompanied on his visits by a staff or selected officers of state. The critical

3. *Brief Notices of Hayti*, pp. 24, 25.
4. *La Géographie de l'Ile d'Haïti*, pp. 181, 96 ff.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3



175 581 588 643 Englishman, Sir Spenser St. John, said that he had met placées of the President at dinner, and was asked to trace resemblances between children and their reported father. "No one seeks to conceal it, and the conversation of married ladies continually turns on this subject. One excuse for it is that many of the ladies whom you meet in society were only married after the birth of their first children. However, according to French law, that ceremony renders them all legitimate. Some of those admitted into society are not married at all, but their daughters being married, prevents notice being taken of the false position of the mother."[5]

565 581 In recent years the élite, although many continue to contract plaçage unions, keep these arrangements quieter than formerly and tend to make them with women lower in the social scale than themselves. Formal and regular marriage is expected and approved among the upper classes of today. Indeed, one modern informant in answer to the question, "What is the primary test of membership among the élite?" replied without hesitation, "Five generations of marriage in the family."[6]

583 565 Formal marriage is not entered into lightly among the upper classes. It is a serious business watched over by state, family, and church. The interest of the state seems to be to guard against bigamy. The possibility of bigamy is the more likely since one or the other contracting party may have formerly lived in plaçage. The interest of the family is in the wisdom of the alliance. Before a wedding can be performed both parties must have obtained the formal consent of their parents, besides having their banns published at their respective places of permanent residence. There seems to be some doubt whether the courts would uphold a father in his refusal to consent to the marriage of a son over twenty-one years old; but cases are known in which such a refusal has stopped the wedding. Of course, the daughters must always obtain parental consent to marry.

585 The civil wedding, adopted in Haiti at the beginning of her independence, is usually followed by a religious ceremony. The Church, like the State, takes precautions against clandestine marriages and bigamy. Notice of a projected union must be read from the pulpit

[114] [581] [554] 5. *Hayti, or the Black Republic*, I, 177–178.

6. John Lobb, in "Caste and Class in Haiti" (*American Journal of Sociology*, XLVI, No. 1 [July, 1940], 29), states that "one informant defined family status as a position resulting from the recognition that in a family the parents had, for generations, been legally married in the church."

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

Another observation must be set



alongside this professional testimony: many men, both aristocrats and common folk, have more than one placée, yet there seem to be enough women for Haitian men.

Although peasants in Haiti are rarely married by formal ceremony, the family is a dominant characteristic of peasant life. This sums up the domestic situation among the masses.

When it is recalled that the Negro, from the time he was taken from Africa on slave ships, had almost no experience of the European tradition of conventional marriage, one has a partial explanation of the absence of peasant weddings. For the rest the people are realists, arguing that a man should have as many women as he needs to carry on the economy of his land holdings; the law forbids polygamy, but exerts no control over plural unions which are entered without formal ceremony. It has therefore come to be regularly accepted in the mores that practical need should determine the number of women to one man. If a peasant increases his land holdings, if he buys or inherits a second farm on the other side of the mountain, it is only common sense for him to take a second woman, raise a family by her, and thus have an overseer and a labor supply resident on each of his properties. Everyone in the community knows what women belong to what man, and custom strongly taboos any tampering with another man's spouses.

Only the Catholic Church has statistics to reveal the infrequency of marriages among the masses. The story was the same a century ago as now. In the important parish of Gonaïves in 1825 the proportion of marriages to births was as 1 to 62; in 1826 they were as 1 to 54.[3] Both figures include marriages and births among the élite, and Gonaïves is a town: in the countryside the proportion of marriages would be much lower. The parish priest of Carrefours, which numbers about a thousand households, stated that in 1936 there had been only ten marriages among his six or eight thousand parishioners. Another parish priest estimated that only one half of one per cent of the baptisms performed were of children born to parents legally married. Even in the parish of Pétionville, home of many élite, a priest estimates that less than one child in five is born to married parents. A century ago a commandant at Léogane, speaking of a high army officer, said, "He is my brother-in-law: I live with his sister." Near Port-au-Prince lived a rural police captain with six placagt

3. Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, II, 119-120.

spouses.